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AUTHOR Brandt, Karen S.
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ABSTRACT

The music, art, and physical education areas can lay the groundwork for the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. For example, music instruction develops receptive, auditory, visual, emotional, and mathematical areas. Art instruction emphasizes eye-hand coordination, creativity, concentration, spatial relationships, planning, and listening skills. Finally, physical education reinforces controlled movement, balance, concentration, coordination, listening skills, and group interaction. (Author/KC)

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MUSIC, ART, AND PHY ED

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BASIC

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By Karen S. Brandt

Presented at the National Association of Elementary School Principals' Convention, April 20, 1980

Interpreting is a manifestation of the inner thinking of a child, whether it be grasping the concept of conservation of a clay mass, the concept of letter sound values, or the concept of a math equation. In other words, children construct knowledge based on their own unique experiences and activities. Language development, and those learnings connected to it, is influenced by the motor, emotional and cognitive development of the child. In the young child, all of these areas should be developed simultaneously. For the child who is bilingual, or who speaks nonstandard, school English it is imperative.

Reading is a function of the auditory neural sensory motor system. However, it is strongly influenced by the emotional development of the child. Identity is a basic human need. Everyone has this need to feel that they are somebody who is special and unique. From the time a person is born until he dies, he struggles to become and to be identified somebody.

The way in which we help youngsters identify themselves is a critical task that schools must address. Some youngsters are able to feel success in schools and they develop a success identity which carries on throughout their lives. Other youngsters identify themselves as failures. Children identify themselves relative to the experiences they have as they grow up. The school ranks children and they will rank themselves accordingly.

It is crucial that we help all youngsters find a success identity in the school setting. If youngsters cannot find success they will identify themselves as failures and they will behave as failures. This can lead to mild or serious withdrawal. Delinquency and emotional problems can be the results.

The MAPE AREAS are the crucial areas in the curriculum to help combat the forces built into our school structure which contribute to failure. These areas allow all youngsters to participate and to find a sense of warmth and acceptance. They allow youngsters to feel successful without ranking. They contribute to their emotional development and the development of self. They enhance the quality of life. They can contribute to a lifelong enjoyment of music, art and physical activity.

Frostig says that body awareness is basic to self awareness, and this leads to self image which is basic to emotional health. She says that 80% of L.D. kids or kids with learning problems have movement motor disabilities. They also have exaggerated emotional adjustment, as in the hyperactive child. These overactive kids suffer from perseveration of movement, they have difficulty planning their actions, they don't forsee consequences of their body movements. They lack control of their bodies and proper body awareness.

Body movement training relates to such abilities as strength and endurance, memory, directionality, balance, attention span, concentration, coordination, agility, flexibility, body awareness, alternating motor patterns to aid concentration, and visual perception.

We have a tendency to expect too much too soon from too many kids in school. The 94-142, IEP mystique is a reaction to some of this. I think many kids are being pushed too fast and the resulting emotional problems lead to ED, BD and LD placements that could be avoided if the regular program would deal with the issues more realistically. Probably as many as 50 to 60% of youngsters beginning first grade will experience some problems in learning to read and write. If Piaget is correct, these difficulties are related to maturation and if we gave the kids more time and more practice with success oriented experiences, we would find kids learning with less stress.

The teaching of music, art and physical education can lay the groundwork for the basic skill areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic. We hear so much about the basic skill areas and budget cuts. We hear that many "frills" must be cut from education so we can "get back to the basics." Some people might consider music, art, or physical education as unnecessary. This is untrue. Indeed, these areas support and enhance all of the basics. They also improve the quality of life and the climate of any school, if they are properly taught.

Music is perhaps the area that is often most neglected. Many people think of music classes as teaching the kids a song, how to read the music book and perhaps play around with a few rhythm instruments. In a quality music program, lots of things happen that develop the ability to read. Some of these things are as follows:

RECEPTIVE AND AUDITORY AREAS

Hearing musical sounds helps children hear spoken language.
Listening to musical notes, hearing notes "in the head" and singing the notes heard, helps children develop listening skills. It helps them to distinguish vowel sounds. It helps them with consonant sounds.
Hearing whole songs helps kids with the rhythm of language, syllabication skills, and word accents.
Learning the words of songs helps children anticipate which word comes next in their reading.
Hearing musical notes in the head develops imagery skills.
Knowing which note or word comes next helps kids with sequencing and organizing.

EXPRESSIVE AREAS

Singing songs helps children with oral reading.
Dramatizing songs helps youngsters gain confidence and poise needed for oral reading.
Clapping accents helps children to hear accents in words.
Musical dictation helps children listen and translate what they hear.
Singing helps children with enunciation.
Vocalizing is good for kids who stutter or have speech problems.
Associating sounds and time with notes and symbols helps kids realize that words are symbols of language and sounds.
Remembering tunes and words long enough to be able to sing them trains children in remembering words long enough to get meaning from them.

VISUAL AREAS

Seeing musical notes helps lay ground work for seeing letters, words and pictures.
Seeing differences in notes helps kids to see differences in letters and words.
Associating sounds and time with notes and symbols helps children realize that words are symbols of language and sound.
Following music from left to right is good training for reading from left to right and from top to bottom.

EMOTIONAL AREAS

Singing helps uptight kids relax.
Children can learn to attend to a task and concentrate by being involved in many highly motivating musical activities.
Kids learn to like themselves because they are successful in musical activities.
Nobody fails in music.

MATH AREAS

Child learns to use a symbolic language.
Figuring out time and key signatures equals problem solving.
Figuring out values of notes increases knowledge of fractions.

Art is the fine arts subject that is most easy to relate to the basic curriculum because much fine motor skill is required. However, many other kinds of skills are required in art. Art is thought to be highly unnecessary by many. It is something that only a few people do well anyway, so why waste valuable time on it in school.

For little kids, it can be salvation! It is highly personal and nobody is ever right or wrong. It can reinforce social studies concepts developed in the classrooms in a concrete way. It requires eye-hand coordination to string a kite tail, or to shape valentines.

Cutting and pasting might seem like time wasted but it helps to develop those muscles that will later be needed for cursive writing in third grade. Free cutting requires judgement and imagery skills which are very necessary to good comprehension in reading. It builds sequencing skills--first I do this and then I do that.

Painting is a highly creative activity. It builds concentration skills and it allows children to share their efforts with others in an emotionally satisfying way. Their eyes and hands work together here and that is a common problem area with L.D. kids.

A feel box builds visual images which the youngsters must then produce on paper or in some other concrete form. It forces concentration on the fine finger muscles and tips and uses them as the source of information to the brain--a valuable skill when learning to write with a pencil or to color with crayons.

Finger paints, clay and crayons are a satisfying way for tiny muscles to grow. You don't get hollered at for not staying in the lines and you can explore and do it right every time. You end up with something that you like and you have fun doing it.

Folding paper requires awareness of spatial relationships--brain damaged kids and kids with reading problems have lots of trouble here and these kinds of activities help them practice.

Free cutting requires visualizing the finished product ahead of time--this requires planning. The use of the scissors requires tiny fingers to work in a very controlled way. It requires organization. It can be very frustrating and requires lots of practice, but for the kid who has never had a scissors before entering school it is very important to have that practice without too much pressure.

Free drawing requires selecting of a subject and deciding on colors and materials. It requires imagery and translation of a mental image. Without imagery skills, kids can't comprehend what they read. They internalize and interpret based on their images.

Concentration is always required in art work. Learning to listen and to follow directions is an important skill learned here too.

Last but not least, art class is the place where creativity thrives and the spirit is free to explore and respond to color and form. It produces emotionally healthy, happy kids, who are getting better at learning.

A good art program for young children should emphasize the development of the fine motor muscles. It should help make youngsters more aware of form and shape. Color should take on new meanings when incorporated into painting and coloring experiences. Children can be taught to look at things with depth and feeling. They can learn to critique their surroundings.

Humans move their bodies before birth. They continue to move and explore their bodies as infants, and body awareness and control begins very early. However, humans develop at different rates, and many kids do not have good body awareness when entering school, and they do not have good body control. This could be due in part to environmental factors such as apartment living, and television. There are less opportunities to exercise the big muscles. Some of this could be due to neurological factors brought about by increased use of drugs on the part of the parents, or slight birth defects. Some of these kids display deep emotional problems which are manifested in hyperactive behavior. This does not mean that they are necessarily hyperactive in the true medical sense, but it does mean that they lack the ability to discipline their own bodies in a way that makes them acceptably behaved in the school setting.

If we are to help youngsters become more able to control their behavior, we must give them opportunities to learn to be aware of their bodies in such a way that they can practice control. Many of these body skills are the foundation for the refined skills needed for formal academic skills.

Walking backwards gives kids a chance to practice movement in a very controlled way. It forces the child to concentrate very hard on controlling what the body is doing. Walking on your heels forces attention to specific parts of the body and also requires concentration. These kinds of activities help that kid who always comes lumbering into the classroom like a Mack Truck--the one who is always bumping into somebody or acting like a clown. As the children move through these varied activities, they must listen and respond to the cues of the teacher. It refines their listening skills, which are highly important in the classroom.

Working on the balance beam helps kids with balance problems and there are lots of kids like that, many of them in upper grades. This forces a very refined control of the body and concentration on all parts of the body. It also requires judgement about where to place the foot, how to hold the arms, what size steps to take. It can be refined to help kids who lack judgement skills by asking them to predict how many steps it will take to get to the end of the beam, what size steps should they be, etc. Usually, they are way off when they first begin this type of activity, but with practice they become better, and this will carry over into their ability to judge in other situations.

The parallel bars forces concentration on arm strength because the body is being supported with arms rather than feet. It requires coordination of the arms on either side of the body and this is very difficult for kids who have balance problems.

Jumping rope and tumbling require concentration on several moving parts. It stimulates leg and arm muscle control, and it promotes endurance. It also produces flexibility, strength and balance. Did you ever tell a bunch of kids to shut their eyes and put first one arm up and then the other, or lift one foot and then the other. If teachers do this and watch youngsters, they will find many kids opening their eyes to see how they are doing, or they will feel with their other hand to see where their arm is. These kids lack proper body awareness--they have not internalized to the point where they know what their body is doing and they need time to work on these skills. The kid who is always into fights and hurts somebody, and never seems to realize that he hit too hard or why the other child is hurt falls into this category too. These kids have perseveration of movement and can't stop their actions as they intend to do. They need to be taught control of their movements.

Square dancing is a terrific activity to build coordination and listening skills--you can't participate if you don't listen to the caller. It also teaches kids proper behavior in a close social setting and encourages good manners and consideration of others. These are all valuable skills for classroom success. On top of that, it is emotionally satisfying and gives kids a feeling of accomplishment.

The parachute activities are done to music and require group cooperation, coordination and creativity. The children make up movements of the chute to the music and use their bodies in conjunction with the chute. They love it and it gives them a sense of quiet beauty.

All of the traditional gross motor skills of hopping, skipping, jumping, stretching and exercising help build coordination and balance. Ball skills aide eye/hand coordination, concentration, fine motor muscle development and attention span. Alternating motor patterns called out by the teacher require listening skills, directionality, memory, and concentration. All of these things are required in the classroom, and kids who fail lack these skills.

Team games require all of the skills mentioned, plus group interaction, and obeying the rules. While all of these things are being practiced and refined, kids are enjoying themselves and feeling good. They aren't being labeled. They are learning to accept themselves in a non-threatening situation. They are exploring their own strengths and weaknesses. They are building awareness of themselves in a positive way. There is something for everyone in a good gym program--there is a place for success for each child.